

EPA, Corps of Engineers move to improve wetlands restoration and conservation  
WASHINGTON, DC - Swamps, bogs, fens, and marshes - in short, wetlands - are as vital to our environment as coral reefs and rain forests. With that in focus, the U.S Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and U.S Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) are proposing a new rule to ensure more effective wetlands restoration and preservation nationwide. The agencies' rule, being published for public comment, proposes improved science and results-oriented standards to increase the quality and effectiveness of wetlands conservation practices under the Clean Water Act (CWA).

"We are accelerating the pace of wetlands restoration and conservation," said Benjamin H. Grumbles, U.S. EPA Assistant Administrator for Water. "Today's action, which emphasizes the best available science, promotes innovation and focuses on results which will help our nation meet the President's ambitious wetlands goal, while promoting flexibility and accountability."

"We are focusing on a watershed approach for improving wetlands conservation in this proposed rule," John Paul Woodley Jr., Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works), said. "This approach helps us fulfill the promise President Bush has made to protect, improve and create new wetlands and other aquatic resources."

Because wetlands play such a critical role in the environment, a project proposed to be built in wetlands is first subject to review by the Corps and EPA under the CWA. Consistent with the goal of "no net loss of wetlands," this review often requires a developer to restore or create a wetland to replace the one that was impacted by the project.

The proposed rule:

- Responds to recommendations of the National Research Council to improve the success of wetland restoration and replacement projects
- Sets clear science-based and results-oriented standards nationwide while allowing for regional variations
- Increases and expands public participation
- Encourages watershed-based decisions
- Affirms the "wetlands mitigation sequence" requiring that proposed projects fully avoid and minimize potential wetland impacts before proceeding to mitigation

The proposed rule combines accountability and flexibility.

By focusing on results and accountability, the proposed standards will improve the quality and effectiveness of wetland replacement projects. Most importantly, the proposal establishes a "level playing field" ensuring that all forms of wetlands conservation satisfy the same high environmental standards.

Increased reliance on innovative, market-based approaches is expected to promote the expansion of wetland banking, which is one of the most reliable and environmentally effective methods of wetland replacement. A wetland bank is a wetland, stream, or other aquatic resource area that has been restored and protected to offset permitted impacts to wetlands or other aquatic resources.

wetlands provide important environmental functions including protecting and improving water quality and providing habitat to fish and wildlife. Wetlands are also critically important areas for storing floodwaters and can reduce damage from storm surges caused by hurricanes.

For more information regarding compensatory mitigation and how to provide comments on the proposed standards see:

<http://www.epa.gov/wetlandsmitigation>. Information about the importance of wetlands is available at:

<http://www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands/>. Additional information about the Corps' regulatory program can be found at:

<http://www.usace.army.mil/inet/functions/cw/cecwo/reg/>